

OF THE
COLOUR BLUE

as written by a

GIRL

who never was.

This note is dedicated to the public domain.

I

REBORN TO FOLLOW THEIR WAY

On the ninth of September MCMXCVIII, at nine minutes after three in the afternoon, I was born into this world, weighing nine pounds and nine ounces, which made me a somewhat heavy newborn, though an otherwise unremarkable one. From what I have been told, I was to have been born in late August, however I was instead kept for a few weeks longer by wyrd, for whatever reason. When I finally did come, I was the fourth child of my mother and the second of her then-husband, but had for a sibling only an older brother, who was about a year older than me. I have no more than a few memories from those early years of my life, which is probably a good thing, as the then-husband was a thoroughly terrible person, often shouting and generally upsetting the household mood in whatever way he could, so that peace of mind was never found. He left us many times, he was always good at leaving; if anyone that I have known is a blight upon this world, it would be him. But anyway, I have somehow kept something pleasant from that time in my life, a feeling if you will. Whilst at some store, I saw a baby doll with pink clothes on a shelf and wanted it, which apparently was not well-received by the then-husband. The whole thing, however, feels like it were only a dream that had come to me in the night, as if time had taken most of it from me. And for all that, I don't know if I ever got that doll, but I can

still see it even now, more than ten years later.

I write no more on the first six or so years of my life, the beginning of it all, as, on the one hand, most of it remains lost to me, and, on the other, it is not particularly interesting or important. So, as is often said, I leave behind the past to go forward, and make no attempt to bring up what should be forgotten.

I skip then to the beginning of my schooling, which I feel is a reasonable place to begin. I would, however, be lying to you if I were to write that I remember the day that I began kindergarten without any trouble, but then again not many do. On that morning, I recall there being a lot of shade on the way to the school; whether that came from the trees or from being at an early hour, I am uncertain. I had been to that school before, I think for registration; as I walked down its hallways then, the brightness of the overhead lights caught my attention, and I felt small, but maybe everything else had been too large. Back to my first day, however, my mother went with me to what would be my classroom, which, I must admit, was not exceptional, though it seemed to have something more to it. Whatever happened throughout the rest of the day eludes me, yet I do know that I was nervous, as any child would be. Nothing about the teacher comes to my mind, only that there were many other children whom I had never seen before, which sounds about right. All things considered, I think that my first day of school went as well as it could have, even though it was relatively uneventful.

My brother for some reason had not gone to kindergarten the previous year, and instead went into the first grade right away, which really didn't help him at all, so I guess I should be thankful that I wasn't thrown into the deep end of the pool like he was. Whatever the circumstances may have been, I

was a reasonably quick learner, and, amidst all of the fooling around that comes with kindergarten, I took in the alphabet and practiced my handwriting, which was fairly good for a six year old (maybe even better than some that were older than me), if I may say so myself.

Although I had no trouble with the schoolwork part of school, it became apparent to me early on that I was somehow different from the other children, even at that young age. I would at times do things that would catch the attention of everyone else, like building stuff out of plastic bricks, even though I never intended for that to happen. For an example, after seeing a lion on the front cover of a book I glued together two sheets of manila paper and then drew a rather large picture of a lion myself with orange and yellow markers. Everyone else apparently noticed this, and made somewhat of a big deal about it, which confused me thoroughly as it was just a drawing to me, nothing more. I remember wondering why they had even noticed at all, as all of the other kids would make drawings in class. How was mine any different from theirs? Regardless, the art teacher ended up coming around to see it, and it seems he thought that I might have had some talent, as I was then involved in the art class, which, to tell you the truth, I never really wanted to do. And, in what should have surprised no one, nothing ever came of it. I don't think that I was very good at doing things when others told me to do them, only when they came from within, and for myself. But anyway, my mother also began volunteering at the school in my classroom that year, though I don't have much memory of that.

Beginning in the second grade, I think that I became more aware of the world around me, if it makes any sense to write that. Whilst sitting in class I would look around

at everything: the walls, the other kids (who were usually listening to the teacher), outside, whatever. Maybe I was just bored, who knows. Anyway, that school year was kind of unusual as my classes were split between two teachers in different classrooms, whereas before I had had only one. Fortunately though the classrooms were right across from each other in the hallway, so that going from one to the other was straightforward. The first one taught English, and the second science and math, but I thought that the former's way of teaching was rather boring, the latter was a lot more enthusiastic about teaching, which made the time spent in his classroom more interesting, to say the least. And I remember the English room as being dim and stuffy, I don't know if that was due to a lack of windows or what, but sitting in there was always a chore in itself. The other classroom was just the opposite, and had much better lighting from several windows, which also gave a view to the front of the school as an added bonus. Needless to say, I liked that room a lot more.

I really got into space for a time there, and I still remember learning all about each of the planets in our solar system (Neptune was my favourite by the way). And as luck would have it, Pluto was deemed a dwarf planet earlier that year, which I thought was a bit unfair, and kind of reminded me of the story of how Hades drew the short stick and was then given the Underworld to reign in, while the other gods were in Olympus. Anyway, I would sometimes look up at the stars in the night sky and would feel absolute wonder at them, but unfortunately I could only see a fraction of what was actually there as a result of light pollution (it is a shame that I have, like so many people today, never seen the night sky as it ought to be seen, but I guess that I'll never get to). So

I took a liking to science early on, but I also found that I had some skill in math around the same time. You see, we would have these sheets filled with multiplication problems, and you had to do as many as you could within the given time. I did reasonably well on them as I was pretty quick, but I must say that I cheated once or twice by lifting the corner of the paper and peaking at whatever I could before the time began (my bad). I can't say that I found any interest in math though, besides the thrill of the timed challenge it was like the English room across the hall: boring. Oh yeah, and before I forget it I once stole a pencil from my teacher's desk as I didn't have one myself. Sorry about that.

For some time then, I had been feeling something that is really hard to put into words, but I guess that I will give it a try nevertheless. I had always felt awkward in my body for as long as I could remember, that something wasn't quite right, but I think that I just did my best to put it out of my mind. The moment when I first felt that something might be wrong I remember clearly however. I had been standing in line outside of my second teacher's room, which we would have to do before going in. It crept up slowly, ever so slowly, so that I could only barely feel it, but after a few moments it became overwhelming. I was utterly baffled at first, as I could not put my finger on what it was, but then some sense of worry came over me as I realised that the feeling was coming from my groin. It went away, though, as I went into the classroom and thought about other things. But as I now look back on that moment, I know what I felt. You can probably guess for yourself what it was, but if you can't, it was my realising that there was something wrong with the genitals of my body, though at that time I had no knowledge of the human reproductive system.

That same feeling would come to me over and over again, however: sometimes while sitting in class, sometimes while using the toilet, whenever. But I would always try to push the feeling from my thoughts, which was about the only thing that I could do. Now, at the end of the year the school would have some sort of graduation ceremony for each of the grades, and the students would have to perform some sort of musical thingie, which, if you ask me, was kind of silly. Anyway, we would practice in the time leading up the thing (we apparently had nothing better to do), and that is where I noticed something else. I had always been a quiet child, a little shy even, but whilst I stood amongst all of the others on the stage I felt so uneasy, and could not bring myself to do anything more than half mumble along. I think that was the beginnings of the anxiety that would come a few years later, but I really don't know. In all honesty, I simply can't describe how it felt, no matter how much I might try, so I leave you in the dark on that one.

The then-husband, in the end, left for the final time, so that I had only my mother and brother. I have no memory of ever missing him, and now that I think of it, I don't think that I even thought about him afterwards; he was simply irrelevant to me. Anyway, in the year MMV, when I was six years old and before I began first grade, we ended up moving to this newly renovated hospital (yeah, I know) which had been converted into artist lofts, where we were amongst the first to move in if I am not mistaken. My mother had always been interested in the building, apparently because it was allegedly haunted. She even went there one night, and snuck inside, but that was some time before we lived there and I only vaguely remember it. When I first went there I was amazed at just how large the building actually was, but

I don't think that I really noticed its older aesthetic. One of the first memories that I have of living there, though, came when my brother supposedly saw the ghost of a nurse, who wore an old-fashioned dress, which makes sense considering that it was once a hospital. He made a drawing of it, and showed our mother, but didn't want to talk anymore about it. It seemed like everyone but me believed that the building was haunted, though I think that our mother influenced my brother. In fact, there was this stairwell that led to the mailboxes, which I would always have to check as he was too scared, though he would never admit it. But I never once saw anything that could be considered unnatural while living there, and I was actually a lot more unnerved by everyone else, rather than the building.

Throughout elementary school, I always felt as if I were not really being myself, which is a fairly difficult thing to get across in writing. You know, I never liked most of the boys in my classes; they were generally loud and hyper, and as I already wrote, I was nothing like that. And whenever we went to the playground I would go along with whatever game my friends were playing, but I wasn't very good at them, and, to tell you the truth, I never enjoyed them. It felt like there was some kind of implicit competition between all of the boys as to who was best at whatever caught their attention, which I really did not like. But even though I played with the boys, I would secretly look at the girls with a sort of fascination that I cannot now describe. It was a feeling similar to when I would look up at the stars in the night sky: a wonder that stops you right in your tracks. I remember wanting to play house with the girls, and with their dolls, but for some reason I never did. I was always just an outsider; I think that I knew it was socially unacceptable, and that everyone would

probably just make fun of me. So while home I would at times play pretend with my soft toys, which was about as close as I would ever come to calming my inner desires. I would pretend that I were their mommy. But I would only ever play pretend when I was by myself, so that no one else would know. Always alone.

By the fourth grade, for reasons that I won't go into, I was put into a different classroom where I knew pretty much no one at all, leaving behind the few friends that I had in the process. My brother had had the same teacher the year before, and had some trouble with her, so that I was discouraged from the beginning. When I first walked into the classroom I felt really nervous and out of place, which wasn't all that remarkable as I was the new student, something that no one wants to be. Anyway, I don't think that I formed any new friendships after that; at first I would try to meet up with my old friends whenever we went to the playground, but I could tell that we didn't have anything in common anymore. That was perhaps the beginning of my feeling of loneliness, that I didn't fit in anywhere.

Around that time however, the ropes of social anxiety began to wrap around my neck, which would affect me a lot more later on; it was only beginning to overcome me then. I would say that you can probably imagine how I felt, but you can't. Whenever attention found its way to me, my heart would begin pounding inside my chest, and my skin would become damp. I would feel shaky, and speaking would be all the more difficult. The worst feeling, however, was this sinking hole in my gut that seemed to swallow me. The teacher once called me over to her desk (I never got to figure out why), and I was then able to stand in front of her for a few moments before my vision went black and my body gave

out. I apparently wobbled a few steps, and as I regained my footing I remember seeing a confused look on the teacher's face. She asked me if I were alright, and I told her that I had only tripped, which made absolutely no sense at all now that I think about it (what could I have tripped on), but at that moment it did. I ended up going to the nurse's office, and my mother was probably worried when she received the phone call. I was then sent home for the day, and I remember being angry with the teacher for some reason, even though it was not her fault. I had literally no idea what I was experiencing at the time, and I think that I blamed the teacher because she was the one who brought about the episode, even if unknowingly.

Sometime that year we had to take some sort of preliminary test in math, though I only vaguely remember it. Apparently I did well on it as I was then chosen to compete in this local mathematics competition for fourth and fifth graders. There were two different sub-competitions within the thing, but the distinction between them is not important; I was given the one called "written math", where the problems were slower and required you to write stuff down (who would have thought). Anyway, I would go to the school's dedicated math classroom and would prepare with the other students who were competing. On the day of the actual competition, the hallways were quiet as we left the school, as everyone else was in class. It was a really sunny day I think, at least I remember it as such, and it seemed like the drive to the place of the competition took forever, but I was probably just anxious. When we finally got there I saw that quite a few other students from different schools had already arrived, and after waiting around for a while we then went inside the building. Some more waiting followed,

and the thing eventually began, but, to tell you the truth, I don't really know what was on the test. Anyway, some time later, the results of the competition were announced over the intercom while I was sitting at my desk in class, and I remember feeling disappointed as I didn't hear my name amongst those that were being called out. And as third and second place passed, I thought that I had not placed at all, but I was shown wrong a few moments later when I heard my own name announced as the first place winner. Sadly, I don't remember how I felt about it, but I was given a reasonable trophy made mostly of plastic; our teacher took a picture of the entire class while I held it. I have that picture now, and I keep it between pages 178 and 179 of a certain book, but the trophy was ruined a few years later by my little sister; it was thrown away soon after. Still, I have the memory. And that's all that matters, right?

As an ending to this part of my life, I go to what I think was the summer after the third grade. One day, while our mother was not home, my brother began to call me a girl. It angered me. Before I knew it, I was kicking the bathroom door, as he had locked himself within; it left a small hole. I don't remember how she reacted to that, but that hole always brought that word back to me: girl. I don't know why he teased me with that.

II

NOW THE SUN IS IN MY EYES

Not long after I had begun the fifth grade, the three of us ended up moving to a different city in Texas, which I actually thought was quite nice, as the place that we had been living in was rather run-down. Anyway, it was a reasonable trip to our new home, but I had never really gone anywhere before, so I thought of it as somewhat of an adventure into an unknown land (I always liked looking at the passing scenery through the window). When we finally got there it was in the evening, I think. The apartment was mostly empty on that night, but I don't know if that were because we had very little belongings, or if we had left some things behind; either way, it doesn't matter. The flooring was some sort of beige carpet in most of the place, except for the kitchen and bathrooms, and the walls were all painted white, which gave the apartment a clean appearance. Now that I think back on it, with much more knowledge, that was a rather nice neighbourhood. I didn't appreciate it then.

Soon after settling in, I went with my mother to register at the local elementary school, which was conveniently within walking distance (and by that I mean right down the street). The school building itself was a lot smaller than my old one, but there was also a large field beside it, which kind of made up for it I guess (not really). So, as my mother took care of the paperwork and whatever else at the front office,

I found myself a seat nearby, and then looked around for a bit. The thought that I would have to spend the rest of the school year going there crossed my mind. Anyway, after all of that was done with, I remember being given the choice of starting right then and there, or on the following Monday. I don't know exactly how it went down, but when I did start some woman led me through the hallways, and then out the school's rear doors. Unbeknownst to me, I was in for quite the surprise, as I then found out that my new classroom would be in some sort of modular building, which I think everyone called a "t-shack" or something ridiculous like that. I got to meet my new teacher, which I don't really remember, and then once again found myself out of place amongst everyone else. Although the same thing had pretty much happened to me in the fourth grade, it was a lot worse that time, as I had come from another city and had never seen any of the other students before.

Unlike the years up until then, where I still had at least a few friends even though I was quiet, I found myself truly alone at that school. I wouldn't really speak to anyone in class, and at lunch I would just sit wherever I could, not caring whom I sat next to. At the playground I would find a spot in the shade, and just sit there alone (we apparently still had recess in the fifth grade). That was for a few reasons. For one, there was not a single tree whatsoever, and the heat was simply too much for me (anyone who lives in Texas knows this). But I think that the biggest reason was that I just didn't have a desire to do anything more than sit there by myself. I really did not want to play whatever sport with the boys, as I had nothing in common with them: I hated sports, and I hated the feeling of being a sweaty mess. My seemingly antisocial behaviour was evidently noticed by my teacher, as

she sent over some girl to me, which I didn't know at the time, to ask why I was just sitting there, or something like that. I think I told her that it was too hot, which was not necessarily a lie. Unfortunately for me, it didn't end there, as that teacher actually called my grandmother about me (I don't know why she had her number), which was a rather cheeky thing to do if I may say so. In what would surprise no one ever, my grandmother then called my mother, who in turn came to me, however I don't remember what happened in that conversation. Probably for the best.

Eventually, after some months, I was found to have "improved" socially, as I had made some effort to talk to others, and waste away the time doing my best to be like everyone else. The decline of my performance in school, however, began that year, as I couldn't have cared less about academics by that time, and most of it was only review anyway. But that was a sort of in-between time in my life, where it seemed I could do nothing but wait for it to end. And I had absolutely no idea why I was different from everyone else, why I felt the way that I did. I would describe that time as something like a flipbook, where each day is on a different page. You can only imagine my relief when I walked out of that school for the last time.

Near the end of the school year, the fifth grade classes made something of a trip to the middle school that most of us would be going to following the summer. Of that, two things stand out in my memory. Firstly, the campus made the other schools that I had gone to look like those tiny plastic houses from Monopoly: it was massive. The most memorable thing from that trip, however, came when everyone went to the cafeteria for lunch (apparently we needed to eat while there, go figure). So, being the introvert that I had

become, I found myself a seat away from everyone else, and quietly ate my food. No doubt a pitiable sight. Some girl from the eighth grade must have thought so, as she took the seat right in front of mine out of the blue. No one ever noticed me, but she did. I don't even know what she said to me, but I remember feeling really upbeat that someone actually cared enough to talk. And she was a girl, which made the whole thing so much better to me, as the girls at my elementary school had pretty much completely ignored me; I was just another boy to them. Anyway, the rest of that trip was more or less a waste of time. But I guess it was better than sitting in one of those "t-shacks".

III

AND I'M NOT MYSELF WHILE I'M WIDE AWAKE

Up until that time, I think that I had been able to at least deal with the feelings that I was having without fracturing, even though my ability to socialise had become increasingly worse. All of that changed, however, during the spring of the year MMX, with the onset of puberty. Before then, my feelings of uncomfortableness and wrongness in my own body had been, for all of those years, kept in my innermost thoughts, so that I never quite understood it. I... can't describe how it felt; the only way to understand would be to go through it for yourself. On one afternoon, I sat down and researched the human reproductive system on the internet, beginning with the female. You see, no one ever told me anything about that, everyone seemed to pretend that it simply did not exist. Anyway, after I felt that I had read enough on it, I went into the bathroom to take a shower. Before I did so, however, I took off my clothes and looked at myself in the mirror. I became aware at that moment of how wrong it all felt, and that somehow I was not in the right body. I wasn't really able to make sense of what it meant then, and how to deal with my changing feelings and body. But I knew who I was. At least I had that, at least I had that.

On the morning of my first day in middle school, my mother made a point of telling me to make sure that I didn't miss the bus after school, which I thought was kind of self-

evident, but she always thought that I couldn't do things by myself. So I then left the house with my brother and waited for the bus near the front entrance of our apartment complex; some had gone to the same elementary school as I, others I had never seen before. When the bus got there, I found an empty seat for myself, and began to go through some sort of mental preparation. As we headed to the school, I looked out of the window for the most part (as I said before, it's a habit), and saw everything as it passed; I liked seeing the world around me I guess. The first thing that I caught sight of when we finally arrived at the school was that there were a lot of school buses already there. And as I looked at the football field and track to my right I realised once again just how large the school campus was, which made me all the more nervous. After stepping off the bus, I followed the crowd through the two glass doors that led into the cafeteria, and then heard the noise that comes with lots of people in one area. I had come to dread that noise.

Before I knew it, I was standing in the middle of a hallway, looking for where my classes were on a map of the school that I had as others walked around me. And as I went up a staircase to the second floor, my thoughts were only on how I would find the homeroom; I was worried that I might become lost, as I would have to talk to someone then. My easiness was lessened, however, as I right away found the correct room after walking through the crowded hallway. That room would also be for my science class, and I found a seat at an empty table. I waited there, and watched as the other students showed up, knowing none of them (what has this been, like the third time already). I felt alone. I don't know if anyone ever took the seat next to mine, but it made no difference either way.

At this point I have to stop writing chronologically, as it really doesn't make any sense to keep doing so, and it would only make it even harder for me. So, with that out of the way, here I go again.

From the fourth grade onwards, as I wrote before, I found myself increasingly unable to function normally in social situations as a result of ever-worsening anxiety and a general feeling that something was wrong with my body, and so I tried to avoid them whenever I could. Whatever I had felt during those two years, however, became nothing compared to what I felt throughout the sixth grade. I was relatively fine in class, where there weren't many other people, except when attention found its way to me (like the teacher calling on me), but I made an effort to remain unnoticed so that it wouldn't happen too much. Any feelings of assurance that I might have had in class were quickly lost, however, when lunchtime came, as there would be a few hundred or so students there in the cafeteria. The unfathomable fear that would overcome me then had such an impact, that it feels like it were only yesterday that I had last felt it. The feeling itself was simply beyond words; the largest wordbook in the world wouldn't do it any justice.

Although I can't describe how it felt, I can write about the thoughts that would go through my head during those moments of anxiety. It would seem like everyone around me was staring at me, having stopped what they were doing, and after bit they would begin to point and laugh at me. Some of them would yell things too; sometimes it was how worthless I was, other times it was how no one would ever love me, and that I would never be accepted. But the worst of it was when all of the girls would gather together and whisper to themselves, knowing that I could hear them, saying that I would

never be one of them, and that I was worth nothing, that I was ugly. I have absolutely no idea how I managed to withstand any of that every single school day: how could anyone? I would always return to the real world though, usually after sitting down, but it would always remain in the background, ready to strike once more. I would have to brave this anxiety multiple times throughout every waking day, starting in the morning when I would walk down a hallway that led to the gym, where I would wait alone before first period. Obviously though, I did not literally see or hear any of that (I'm not that crazy), that was just what I imagined during those fits of anxiety.

So, with a thoroughly crippling fear when around groups of people, and an ever-present inability to relate to others my age, it should be no surprise to hear that I became a proper loner with no friends to speak of. At times though, I would go along with one group or another, but it would never last longer, and I would always feel that I didn't belong with any of them. This became somewhat of a problem for me at lunchtime, where empty seats away from others were few and far between, so that I had to wander around in search for such a seat, which would result in even more anxiety as others began to look at me. I would sit wherever I could, often next to people that I didn't know at all. To make the situation worse, eating in front of others, even people that I had known for a long time like my brother and mother, was a trigger for my anxiety, so I would just quietly sit there, looking downwards, and eat my food as best as I could. Needless to say, I would quickly leave as soon as the bell for the next period rang. But the loneliness continued to grow, and I was unable to get away from it. As I walked through the hallways of that school everyday, I would watch others,

and saw that they were living. But I wasn't anything like them.

As all of this went on, my body was changing. The biggest thing at first was my voice, which became rather deep for someone of my age, so from then on people would always comment on it. I hated that, as one would imagine, and it made speaking all the more difficult and anxiety inducing (like it wasn't hard enough already); I have felt shame and insecurity towards my own voice ever since. Then there was my body. I don't know how everyone else went through it, but I would always compare myself to the girls that I saw at school. But there was this one girl in either the seventh or eighth grade (doesn't really matter which one), who had blonde hair and went on the same bus as me. I thought that she was the prettiest girl, and I began to envy her. I don't really need to write it, but I will do so anyway for illustrative purposes: this utterly wrecked my self esteem. I felt disgust towards my body, and this was furthered as I saw the other girls changing in ways that I weren't. It felt wrong to be within my own skin, and this turned into embarrassment whenever in the presence of others, which intensified the anxiety infinitely.

And like my body, I also didn't feel comfortable in the clothing that I wore, something that I had first felt some years before in elementary school. That, I must write, was secondary to everything else that I was feeling, but it still contributed to the ever growing pressure. I really didn't like wearing short-sleeved shirts (basically what I would wear every day), they made me feel exposed and vulnerable; I hated every inch of my skin and wanted to hide it. One morning, before I had left for school, I got into something of an upsetting argument with my mother over my clothes (I

think I didn't want to wear a certain pair of pants), and ended up crying. I would sometimes imagine wearing clothes like the rest of the girls, but even though I wanted to I knew that I couldn't: my body wouldn't let me. But all was not yet lost to me, as I noticed one day that I had some, admittedly minor, growth in both of my breasts (no, they weren't tumours). I still remember standing before the mirror, and feeling so excited as I looked at my chest; I thought that I were going to finally be like the other girls. I didn't yet know the truth, that it would never be. Whatever growth that I had would be lost with time.

Yet another source of anxiety for me was the restroom (I have always thought that the word was misleading, as I have yet to see anyone resting in such a place. Oh well). So, public restrooms have always given me a lot of trouble, and my earliest memories come from around the first grade. I would go as few times as possible, and only used the stalls when I did, never any of the urinals, no matter what; I would have preferred to wet myself, but thankfully that never happened. Now, by the sixth grade this became a much bigger problem for me. I would only go to the restroom when absolutely necessary, and this meant that I would, more often than not, hold it in for the entire school day, which, I must say, was not a pleasant experience, to say the least (it certainly didn't do my bladder and kidneys any favours). It was simply distressing to use the toilet in the boy's room, and even in the confines of a stall I had quite some difficulty urinating. Sometimes I would be physically unable to, in which case I would eagerly give up and leave as quick as I could. So, instead of having to go through that, I ignored it as much as I could. A similar anxiety came in the locker room before and after gym, where I would have to undress in front of male stu-

dents. That was probably the worst of it all. I would have to imagine to myself that I weren't there as I quickly changed my clothes, which didn't help much. But it didn't matter whether I were in the boy's restroom or the locker room. Absolute dread overcame me as I went into either.

After a while into that school year, I would just spend my days daydreaming that I were like all of the other girls, which my way of getting by. So, in class, I would waste away the time in my thoughts, but by then I didn't care about academics at all; I felt that I had far more to worry about, and the anxiety took a lot of my energy to begin with. Although this began as a way to relieve my stress while in class, it eventually spread to other areas in my life. Like in gym, while I was running laps around the tracks I would always ask myself why I was there, why I had to go through all of it. Sometimes I would see the school's cheerleaders, usually after the day was over, and I remember wanting to be one of them; I imagined what it would be like on the ride home, to be able to do the things that I wanted. All of these thoughts would culminate at night as I lay in bed, sometimes with my eyes closed, and sometimes as I stared up at the blankness that was the ceiling. I would imagine waking up in the morning to find that I was a normal girl. How wonderful it would be. I would wish for that every night, but in the morning I would always find that my wish had gone unanswered. I was the same as the day before. Always the same.

Although most of my thoughts during that time were taken up by anxiety and the negative changes happening to my body, I was met with yet another stress as I came to the realisation that I was attracted to boys. This brought me a lot of shame, not because I thought that it was wrong or anything like that, but because I knew that no one would

be able to acknowledge me for who I was. And I also knew that no boy would ever want to be with me, as I was different from the girls that they sought after in a significant way, which further contributed to my feeling of loneliness and self-loathing.

So it must be asked why I did not tell anyone about any of this. Well, the answer is not really straightforward. For one, I trusted no one enough to let them in on my feelings. Who could I have told? My mom? She and I were apparently close when I was a lot younger, but by then any relationship that we might have had had (haha, that's really awkward to the ear) faded away into nothing, so that she was hardly more than a stranger in my eyes. I think, however, that the most likely reason was that I was absolutely terrified. Terrified of what others would think of me, or if they would even accept me at all. And, as far as I knew, I was the only one like myself in the area. So I told no one, and kept my feelings hidden. Kept myself hidden. I tried my best to be what everyone saw me as, but it never really worked out in the end, and it only made me feel worse. My brother, for example, always wanted to throw the football (yet another word that makes little sense, it seems to be an American thing), and I would have to go along with it as I didn't really have a choice in the matter. I hated football (still do). Anyway, I remember that he would get pretty mad at my inability to throw (like the ball would land at his feet over and over again, one might have even said that I threw "like a girl", at least compared to him), which actually made me laugh to myself as I thought it was funny that he got upset over a stupid ball. I ended up trying out for the football team at one point, which I didn't want to do at all. But hey, peer pressure, right?

I tried to fit in through other ways, such as pretending to

like whatever music was popular at the time, even though I really didn't. So, since I never got to say it then, I will say it here: my favourite singer at the time was Taylor Swift, and of hers, my favourite song was "Love Story". You know, I'll be the first to admit that it's not a musical masterpiece, but it made me feel better as I sailed across a sea of unending fear; it had a youthful hope that I haven't been able to feel for years. But, just as it went in all of the fairy tales that children are told, I imagined that I were the princess and that a prince would come to take me away from all of my troubles. But no such prince would ever come. Anyway, my favourite line was:

"Romeo save me, they're trying to tell me how to feel".

Everyone was telling me that I were something that I wasn't. They were wrong, but they were telling to how to feel. And what could I do, but imagine that a prince would save me? Oh yeah, and as luck would have it, she is apparently going to be performing in Houston (where I live) on the ninth of September, which would have been my seventeenth birthday. It's a Wednesday too, like the day that I was born (what are the odds). To tell you the truth though, I'm not really into her recent music (in the off chance that you are reading this, no offence; but thanks for making me feel better when I was younger, that was more than my own family ever did). I would have wanted to go anyways, but unfortunately I only have ten dollars and no way to get there. Oh well, maybe another time.

I was able to withstand it all to the end of the school year, but by then I could already feel myself becoming tired. On the last day, as is traditional in American schools, there really

was no reason to be there, and it would have been just as well to have not gone at all (the Texas Board of Education isn't known for their competence). So, with that in mind, everyone pretty much got to do whatever they wanted for the span of the half-day. I would say that most of the students stayed inside the gym, as the summer heat was rather excessive. Unfortunately for me, that meant that I had the choice of either enduring the heat or being taken away by anxiety. Naturally, I went for the first one, and sat underneath the Sun for what seemed like hours (though I was forced to go through the gym for water every now and then). Was I bothered having to sit there for no apparent reason, without any friends to keep me company? No, not really. In all of the years before, I had felt something on the last day of school, sometimes relief and sometimes excitement, but not then. That was the first time that I felt nothing, except maybe weariness. That feeling remained as I stepped on the bus for the last time, and as I walked home. As if nothing even mattered anymore.

But one more thing before I end this. One night I went outside to the small playground that was right in front of my apartment, and sat down on the seat of the leftmost swing. I've always liked the night, it's peaceful then, and on that particular night I had a lot going on in my mind. I just wanted to be somewhere away from others, without anything to bother me. So I began to swing back and forth, and I looked up at the night sky, and saw the moon, far away. I closed my eyes as I swung, and focused on the coolness of the air against my face for what felt a while, but was probably only a few minutes. My eyes opened though, as the faint sound of voices entered my ears. A few moments later, that blonde girl from the bus stop walked past me with one of her friends; I don't think that either of them even looked at me. I remember feeling

as if I had been mocked. You know? On the one night that I went outside to get away for a little bit, that girl, who was everything that I was not, was there. Why?

III

A BIRD WHO DID NOT REALISE THAT HER WINGS WERE BROKEN UNTIL SHE TRIED TO FLY

After many, many years of hiding who I really am, and trying to be what everyone else wanted me to be, I got to the point where I couldn't do it anymore. So over a few weeks I handwrote a coming out letter, it took that long because I used rulers and other things to make sure that it was as perfect as it could be. However, once I finished it I realised that I didn't have it in me to give it to my mother, so I sealed it within an envelope and hid it inside a book in my closet. And that was that.

Three months went by, and in that time I fought with myself over whether to give her the letter. Should I do it? That thought went through my head all day, every day. But in the end I lost that struggle, and without any hope left I shaved my shoulder-length hair to a buzzcut. My hair was the only thing that I had, the only way that I could be myself without anyone knowing. Cutting it was acknowledging that I had been defeated. And I hated myself even more afterwards. My mother asked if I were depressed, because apparently depressed people make sudden changes to themselves. I said that I wasn't. That could have been the end of it, and she wouldn't have known what was actually going on. She never cared at all.

But on the following morning, the twelfth of June, something changed. I woke up and knew that I had to give her the letter, that I couldn't lie anymore. And as I lay there in my bed, the anxiety kept growing. I felt like I was going to throw up. I got up though, and went to take a shower first, and just tried to calm myself down, but it didn't really help. As I walked over to my mother in the kitchen, I was absolutely terrified, and each step seemed so little. I was able to hand her the letter, and I said something before I quickly went back to my room, where I sat down and held my face in my hands. Waiting.

I had asked her not to tell anyone, but she ended up disregarding that and told her husband, my grandmother, and my brother. At first they seemed fine with it. And I wasn't kicked out of the house, so everything was going great, right? No. After a few days, I learned that my own mother was actually unable to accept me for who I was, and that whatever she said before was just her saying what she thought she should. To my dismay, she then said whatever she could to explain it away in her mind. She told me that I was mentally ill, that I was confused, and even that the internet was to blame (honestly one of the most ridiculous things that I've heard). She asked me why I couldn't have just been gay, how that would have been so much easier. She suggested that I live as a gay male. And everything changed just like that. They couldn't accept me, as I had feared all of those years.

It has been around two months, and no one has spoken of it since. Nothing at all, not a word. Everyone has pretended that it simply never happened; I had to ask myself at one point if I had just imagined it all (I didn't). They still call me a boy, a son, a brother. It feels like a stake is being

driven through my heart every time I hear them call me those things. Because I'm not. My mother even tried to shame me once, saying that I had never been a brother to my brother (that sounds a bit awkward, but just go with it), and that now he has real brothers in the Marines. Well, the answer to that is simple: I never was his brother. Oh yeah, and I've also become something of an insult around here: whenever my little sister acts up she asks her if she wants to be like me. Yeah, thanks a lot for that, it really did make me feel better.

She went as far as using the tried-and-true guilt trip of "others have it a lot worse than you, so be grateful". You know, a rather large amount of people seem to think that this is good reasoning. Who seriously thinks that putting things like that on a scale is a good idea? Mental pressure, like most things, is relative, and it's senseless to try and put something like that on a scale. I mean, I guess no one at all in the West can be depressed, but that is obviously not the case. You should feel bad as a person if you belittle someone who is struggling with depression and anxiety by saying stuff like that. It only goes to show how little you know if you think that it will help.

I could go on and on about them, but why bother? They know what they said (I'm looking right at you "mom"). I am not confused. I am not out of my mind (though many will no doubt say that I am). Hell, the main reason that I wrote this note was to show that I'm not mad. Whether anyone believes me remains to be seen, but I think that I already know the answer.

From what I have seen, I don't think that transgender people will be accepted in our society for years to come, if ever. For every one person with an open mind, there are a thousand more who dismiss and discriminate against us. The

general view seems to be that transgender people are simply suffering from a mental illness, and that transitioning should not be allowed. Many of them point to the high suicide rate for those that are transgender. If you haven't guessed it by now, I am not a psychologist. Even so, I know why so many transgender people have chosen to kill themselves. It is because they are denied the opportunity to be who they really are, the medical and insurance situation is a proper mess, discrimination and narrow-mindedness is widespread, and the list keeps going. The best way to make sure that people like me continue killing themselves is this: keep doing what you're already doing, America. It's working.

Why am I killing myself? Not because of the depression, the anxiety, or anything convenient like that. I am doing it because no one will allow me to be myself, and no one will ever accept me for who I am. All I ever wanted was to just be myself, but you wouldn't let me. I don't fear death. I fear having to wake up one more day to discover all over again that I am in the wrong body. Living as I have been is not living at all: it's dying a slow, painful death over many years. To put it simply, I am killing myself because I cannot transition. Because, having been forced to go through male puberty, there is nothing more that I can do. Sometimes, the bravest thing that one can do is to know when to let go of the thread that one is holding on to. I am letting go of that thread.

If you are the parent of a transgender child, I urge you to look beyond yourself. Accept your child for who they really are, and just let them be themselves. Otherwise, you aren't really a parent at all, except in title. But it's your choice. Just know that whatever you choose may or may not end up in your child killing themselves. No pressure. — Nicola